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ABSTRACT

The intent of this paper is to provide groundwork that will lead in the direction of conceptual and methodological clarity, coherence, and organization for empirical research in intercultural communication in the 1980s. Following a discussion of the nature of intercultural communication, the paper examines its diverse conceptualizations by delineating a number of organizing dimensions. Next, it classifies modes of inquiry in intercultural communication at both the group and individual levels. Current methodological issues relevant to empirical research in the field are then reviewed. In conclusion, the paper discusses the need for integrating the diverse conceptual and methodological orientations. (FL)

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Empirical Research in Intercultural Communication in the 80's: Searching for Creative Integration of Diverse Approaches

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A. Introduction

One may refer to the 70's as the period in search of disciplinary identity for the field of intercultural communication. Motivated primarily by interests and needs in meeting practical intercultural "problems," pioneers of the field have strived to be accepted by the rest of the field of communication as a distinct, respectable area of study. It is as though we are beginning to overcome the initial "insecurity" in our academic identity. Joint programs between intercultural communication groups and other divisions (such as Interpersonal Communication and Mass Communication) appear in recent conferences of the Speech Communication Association and the Intercultural Communication Association. The number of publications, research activities, and conference programs on intercultural communication have significantly grown. Two recent publications, International and Intercultural Communication (Casmir, 1978) and the Handbook of Intercultural Communication (Asante, Newmark & Blake, 1979) demonstrate serious effort to advance intercultural communication as a respectable member of the social-behavioral-human science.

In spite of the overall progress made so far in the status of intercultural communication as an area of study, there have yet to emerge coherent conceptual paradigms of intercultural communication. A great deal of discussions and writings have been devoted to what we mean by intercultural communication and other related labels such as interracial, international, interethnic, crosscultural, and contracultural communication. We have not quite yet succeeded in developing a comprehensive conceptual

framework for the field, based on which we may proceed with our scientific inquiries using common terminological currencies.

Recently, some promising signs are seen in empirical research in intercultural communication. Serious explorations are being made in the relevance of various existing epistemological-methodological approaches to intercultural communication inquiries. (See, for example, Burk & Lukens, 1978; Jones, 1979; Kim, 1979b; Wiseman, 1978.) Also, a number of initial groundworks have been made to develop middle-range theories and models that attempt to describe, explain, and/or predict intercultural communication phenomena in a number of intercultural contexts such as immigrant acculturation (Kim, 1979a), attitudinal satisfaction of the sojourners (Gudykunst, 1977) and diffusion of ideas across cultures (Vora, 1980), among others.

By and large, however, inquiry in intercultural communication to date has been a collection of widely scattered works ranging from reports on highly personalized experiences and observations of limited aspects of communication patterns in cultures (other than the U.S. White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant culture), to narrowly focused "fact-finding" pieces of empirical research that are primarily descriptive and a-theoretical. Much of the work still relies on the formulation of other disciplines such as anthropology and cross-cultural psychology, divided and fragmented in their theoretical/conceptual, and methodological orientations. (See, also, Saral, 1979; Asante, 1980).

Much of our confusion and fragmentation can of course be attributed to the relatively short disciplinary history as well as the enormously complex and broad phenomena of culture and communication that we deal

with in our inquiries. Communication, by definition, is a multi-disciplinary or "supradisciplinary" field (Budd, 1977). Human communication phenomena cut across the theoretical and methodological traditions of many "older" disciplines (such as psychology, anthropology, sociology, linguistics). Intercultural communication, one of the newer subsystems of communication, is no exception. In a way, the heterogeneity of ideas and approaches in the 70's has been beneficial and, to some extent, necessary for the young field to grow, in spite of the confusion and frustration often experienced by many of us.

Looking ahead into the 80's, a greater degree of conceptual coherence and organization is called for in intercultural communication. We need to take ourselves more seriously and embark on a major leap forward to advance the youthful area of intercultural communication into a mature one. Thus, rather than merely repeating or translating what anthropologists, psychologists, and linguists have said about culture and communication, we need to address ourselves to the fundamental existential question, "what is it that we do in intercultural communication that is significantly different from the rest of the social-behavioral-human sciences?" While we clarify our conceptual identity, we also need to cultivate our methodological tools that are adequate in pursuing our inquiries on intercultural communication.

The intent of this paper is to provide a groundwork for working toward the direction of conceptual and methodological clarity, coherence, and organization for empirical research in intercultural communication in the 80's. First, I will discuss the central theme of our field. Second, the diverse conceptualizations of intercultural communication will be examined

and synthesized by delineating a number of organizing dimensions. Third, modes of inquiry in intercultural communication will be classified in two levels--group level and individual level. Fourth, current methodological issues relevant to empirical research in intercultural communication will be reviewed. Finally, I will discuss the need for integrating the diverse conceptual and methodological orientations.

B. Central Theme of Intercultural Communication

Once again, we need to discuss the often-raised issue, "what is intercultural communication?" "Abstracting" certain human-social phenomena and "naming" it as central conceptual domain of the field are the first necessary steps toward organizing our field. The relative paucity of results that we have been able to gather in the 70's is at least partly attributable to terminological and conceptual problems. A concern about language is a "substantive" issue in inquiry into human behavior. Until naming is improved we may remain so bogged down in confusion and incoherence that communication among us is difficult. Common terminologies will help us clarify the focus and central theme of possible research activities into the phenomena of intercultural communication.

Concepts in communication cross the boundaries of many humanities and social-behavioral-human sciences. Even more complex relationships exist among subdivisions within the discipline of communication. Conventional labels of various communication studies serve the function of differentiating the respective foci of interest for communications scholars. Interpersonal, organizational, and mass communication have been used to categorize communication phenomena in terms of either number of interactants involved, degree of mediation, potential for privacy, or clarity of distinction between sender and receiver roles. Other labels such as instructional, health and therapeutic communication refer to the communication phenomena in specific social contexts. The crux of the matter in intercultural communication which distinguishes it from the rest of the communication studies is the

high degree of variance in the experiential backgrounds of the communicators, i.e., cultural difference (as well as similarities).

Porter and Samovar (1976) state that intercultural communication occurs whenever the parties to a communication act bring with them different experiential backgrounds that reflect a long-standing deposit of group experience, knowledge, and values. Cultural differences, along with other differences between communicators, contribute to the inherent problematic nature of the human communication process. By stressing either actual or perceived cultural differences between communicators, intercultural communication becomes an extension of all interpersonal and other areas of human communication.

Intercultural communication, then, refers to the communication phenomena in which participants, differing in cultural backgrounds, come into direct or indirect contact with one another. While intercultural communication presupposes, and deals with, cultural similarities and differences among the communicators, such cultural characteristics of participants are not the central focus of the study. The focal point of intercultural communication, instead, is the communication process between individuals and groups. Thus, the two critical concepts, contact and communication, distinguish studies of intercultural communcication from the predominant research purpose of anthropologists and cross-cultural psychologists (i.e., to describe and/or identify cultural similarities and differences).

Given the above distinction between intercultural communication and other disciplinary domains, it is clear that, in the past, the bulk of energy and time of researchers in the area of intercultural communica-

tion has been directed toward "intracultural" or "crosscultural," rather than "intercultural" (See, also, Saral, 1979). The majority of the research activities have focused upon communication patterns in specific cultures and on crosscultural comparisons of communication phenomena, closely following the research tradition of anthropology and crosscultural psychology.

Of course, one cannot separate intracultural and crosscultural understanding of communication patterns from studies of intercultural communication. To understand any communication transacion, one needs to know sufficiently the intrapersonal processes, a substantial part of which is culturally shaped and programmed (such as values, attitudes, beliefs, social norms, etc.). Such knowledge, in a sense, contributes to understanding the intercultural contact and communication more fully and realistically. What is critical for students of intercultural communication, however, is to go beyond the level of intracultural and crosscultural characterization of communication patterns, and to focus more on the central conceptual domain of our area, i.e., inter-cultural communication.

C. Dimensions of Intercultural Communication

Given the central theme of inquiry in intercultural communication, i.e., inter-cultural contact and communication, we still need to clarify what we mean by the often-confusing term, culture. In this section, I will attempt to clarify the oeprational meaning of culture in intercultural communication research. Three dimensions--level of cultural system, social context, and communication channels in which intercultural communication occurs--will be presented. These three dimensions are being proposed as a way to synthesize the diverse conceptualizations of culture among scholars and researchers in studying intercultural communication phenomena.

Level of Cultural System

Culture is a concept which has been used by scholars and researchers in the area of intercultural communication to refer to hierarchical levels of scope and complexity in societal organization. The cultural levels usually range from world regions (such as West and East), world sub-regions (such as North America and Southeast Asia), nations (such as France and Japan), ethnic/racial groups within a nation (such as Black-American and Mexican-American), to the level of sociological sub-groups categorized by sex, social class, geographic regions, and counter-cultural groups (such as Hippies, prison inmates, street gangs, etc.). Ultimately, it is theoretically possible to strengthen the notion of culture as an "individual culture" in which each person manifests different experiential background from one another (Broome, 1979). (See Figure 1.)

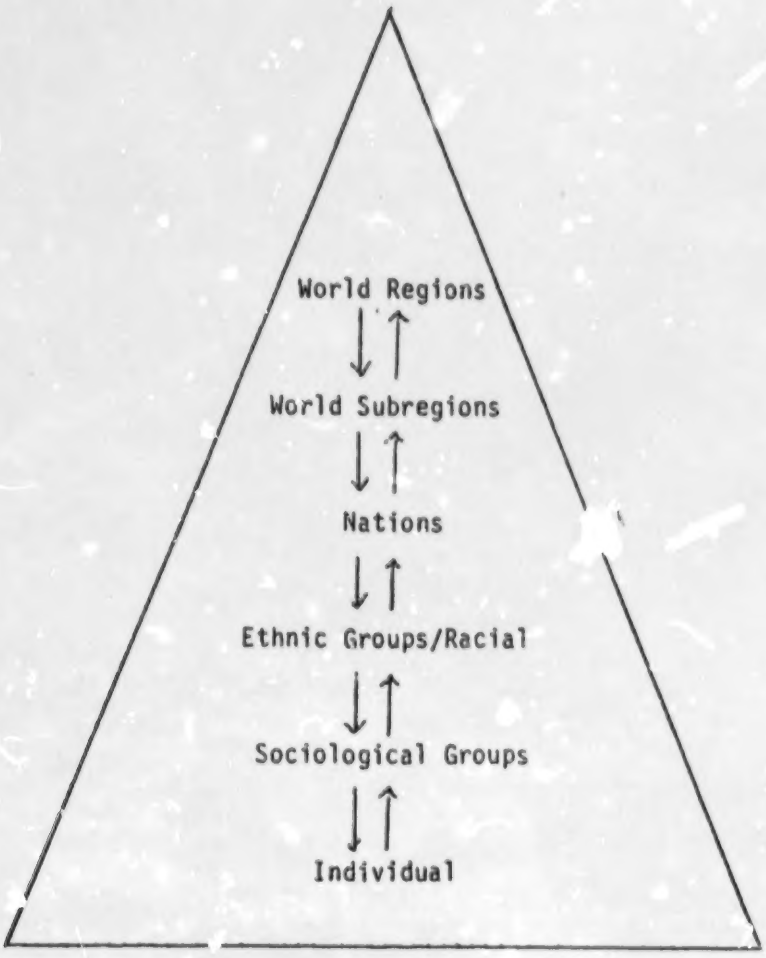

Figure (1): Hierarchical Levels of Culture

Most often, interests of researchers and scholars in intercultural communication have focused on communication patterns within or between individuals and groups with different national cultures of ethnic/racial cultures. Thus, such terms as international communication or interracial/interethnic communication have been frequently used to refer to those specific cultural systems involved.

Social Context

The hierarchical levels of culture and intercultural communication are further differentiated according to the social context in which intercultural communication occurs. Some of the more commonly-studies contexts of intercultural communication include: business/organizational immigrant acculturation, sojourner adaptation, international/intercultural political interaction, international technology transfer and diffusion of innovations, therapeutic counseling of foreign students/immigrants, and education in multi-cultural schools. (See Figure 2.)

Communication Channel

Another dimension by which intercultural communication phenomena can be conceptualized in the channel in which contact and communication occurs. Basically the channels can be classified into two, interpersonal and mediated, depending upon whether or not an intercultural communication occurs through direct contact or through media (such as broadcast media or print media). Studies dealing with the mediated intercultural communication have been often labeled as international communication since the mediated intercultural communication activities frequently occur across national boundaries.

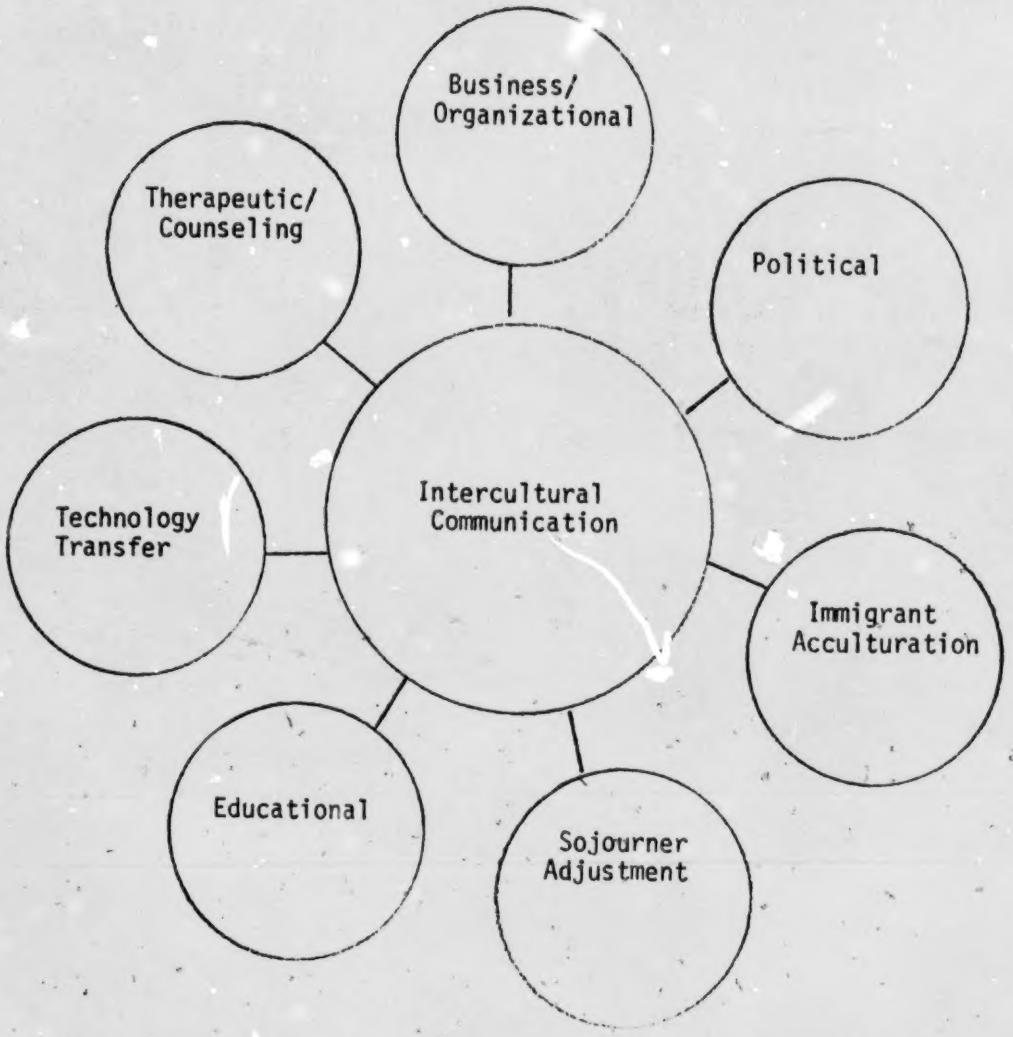

Figure (2): Major Social Contexts in Intercultural Communication

The three dimensions of intercultural communication--level of cultural system, social context, and communication channel--can be used separately or in conjunction with one another in defining specific phenomena of intercultural communication. For example, one can describe the communication interaction between an American businessman and a Japanese businessman as international, business-oriented, interpersonal communication. Similarly, sutdies of immigrants' adjustment processes in the United States can be described as interethnic, interpersonal communication in educational context.

D. Modes of Inquiry in Intercultural Communication

Based on the conceptual framework presented in the preceeding sections, I will now proceed to examine the methodological orientations that have been employed, or can be utilized, in intercultural communication research.

Culture, by definition, is a collective group process, as well as individual process. Individuals are the product of culture, but culture is the product of individuals as well. These two statements are not contradictory: they merely reflect the inherent dialectic character of the societal phenomenon (Berger, 1979). Culture is manifested in individuals' communication patterns. At the same time, the inter-subjective commonality of individuals' communication patterns characterizes the culture as a collective concept.

In studying intercultural communication phenomena, one can conceptualize the interacting cultures either on the group level or on the individual level. At present, I am not aware of any empirical research conducted in the area of intercultural communication which dealt with interacting cultures on the collective group level. Many examples, however, are found among anthropological and sociological studies, which have studied culture as an abstract collective entity and approached it from a holistic point of view.

Group-level Inquiry

The anthropological study of communication patterns in E. Hall's well-known works is a good example. Hall (1959), through his extensive ethnographic studies of many cultural groups, described not only "culture-

specific" communication patterns but also developed a "culture-general" typology of communication patterns labeled Primary Message Systems. In his more recent book, Beyond Culture (1977), Hall focused on the "situational frames" and "action chains" in understanding the "contexting" patterns of individuals across cultures. The overall "contexting" patterns observed in various communication situations, then, were used by Hall in his cross-cultural comparison of communication processes and patterns.

Also, anthropological studies in the school of "acculturation" of the 1930's and thereafter provide more examples of the group-level inquiry of intercultural phenomena. Acculturation studies in the United States grew out of studies of reservation Indians and became enlarged into a general inquiry into the impace of Western civilization on native cultures. These studies relied heavily upon documentary and oral records of the recent past and the present for data. They were not, however, merely histories of peoples, for the aim from the beginning was to reveal the mechanisms or processes by which interchange of culture took place between societies in contact and to ascertain whether the order of change followed certain regularities. The defining feature of the acculturation situation was that the societies in question must "come into continuous firsthand contact," as stated by the original Social Science Research Council symposium on acculturation (Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits, 1939, p. 149), or have "conjunctive relations" with each other, as a 1953 symposium chose to state the matter (SSRC 1954, p. 974). Cultures in this school have been viewed as "complex wholes" showing continuity between their component parts as well as with their pasts. (See, for example, Herskovits, 1966.)

Still more examples of studying intercultural phenomena on group level are provided by many sociological studies on issues pertaining to race or ethnic relations and the social consequences of minority-group membership (Spiro, 1955). A primary conceptual framework employed in the sociological studies has been the pattern and process in which minority groups are assimilated into the host society and the dynamics of relationships within and among minority and majority groups. Like the anthropological studies, a central focus of these sociological studies has been placed on minority groups, rather than individuals within the groups. Relatively little attention has been paid to the pattern and process of culture-contact and changes in individuals.

Individual-level Inquiry

Contrary to the above-mentioned anthropological and sociological studies, research tradition in cross-cultural psychology has been primarily analytic-reductionist-quantitative, focusing on individuals within and across cultural groups. The cross-cultural comparison of "subjective culture" by H. Triandis and his associates (1972) presents a good example. In this study, psychological constructs such as cognitive structure, perception, and attitude, are compared across cultures. While emphasizing the differences across cultures, the primary purpose of the research was to develop a universal concept of subjective culture, which consists of a set of variables by which cross-cultural differences were measured quantitatively. C. Osgood and his associates (1975) also provided a similar example. The study focused on the universals of affective meaning using the semantic differential on population from more than twenty cultural groups.

Closely following the research tradition in cross-cultural psychology, almost all of the empirical studies in intercultural communication have dealt with individuals. So far, the majority of such empirical sutdies have dealt with various aspects of the phenomena of intercultural adjustment, adaptation, or acculturation of individuals. Generally speaking, these studies focus on the adjustment of individuals within a new cultural environment for varied lengths of time, including temporary visitors (such as tourists, exchange students, overseas employees of multinational corporations, international technical advisors, Peace Corps members abroad, foreign students) as well as long-term residents (such as missionaries and immigrants who have moved into another culture on a permanent basis).

Many of the writings on short-term intercultural adjustment are anecdotal, descriptive, or prescriptive in nature. Such interpersonal skills as the ability to display empathy, role behvaior flexibility, display of tolerance for ambiguity, and nonjudgmental attitude have been identified as crucial communication factors in intercultural adjustment. (See Cleveland, Mongone & Adams, 1960; Blein & David, 1971; Barna, 1972; Brislin & Pedersen, 1976, among others.) Despite the rather substantial number of writings which stress the importance of interpersonal communication skills in intercultural "success," there has been relatively little effort directed to establishing the empirical validity of such a perspective. Only very recently, attempts have been made to define and conceptualize communication competencies in the process of individuals' intercultural adjustment, or to operationalize the concepts for empirical research and validation. (See, for example, Gamma & Peterson, 1977;

Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978; Pruitt, 1978; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Pearce & Harris, 1979; Schneider, 1979; Hwang, Chase, & Kelly, 1980; Kim, 1980.) Also, research closely related to the short-term intercultural adjustment has been conducted to evaluate intercultural training programs (Gudykunst, Wiseman, & Hammer, 1977; Katz, 1977).

Studies on long-term intercultural adjustment conducted in the area of intercultural communication have been focusing on individuals and the patterns and processes of communication in the host sociocultural environment. Nagata (1969), for example, conceptualized the acculturation process by looking into the patterns of change in various communication behaviors of Japanese-Americans. Chang (1972) investigated mass media behaviors among Korean immigrants and related the media behaviors to the patterns of change in their original cultural values. Based on these and other empirical studies from anthropological and sociological studies, Kim (1977) developed a causal model of acculturation identifying several key communication variables that positively or negatively affect an immigrant's acculturation. More recently, Kim (1979a) proposed a middle-range theory of acculturation process from a communication point of view, incorporating the dynamic nature of interaction between an immigrant and his sociocultural environment. In addition Schneider (1980) emphasized a need for identifying specific verbal and nonverbal communication behaviors of immigrants and to relate such behavioral indicators to general acculturation process.

On the whole, empirical research in intercultural communication has been focusing on individuals' communication patterns in a new cultural environment, although it is theoretically conceivable to investigate

intercultural communication between two or more cultural groups. This focus on individuals in empirical observation of intercultural communication phenomena closely follows the research tradition of cross-cultural psychology. Most of the studies dealing with interacting cultures on group level have been conducted in anthropology and sociology.

E. Methodological Issues

The empirical studies in the area of intercultural communication focusing on individual communicators have been based primarily on the analytic-reductionist-quantitative approach in methodology. Often, independent variables are identified and tested for their contribution to subsequent change in dependent variables of intercultural adjustment. The general purpose of such research is to explain and predict the process and patterns of individuals' intercultural adjustment within specific social contexts.

The increasing numbers of empirical studies in intercultural communication based on the analytic-quantitative-reductionist approach have been criticized by some scholars. Howell (1979), for example, argued that the predominant analytic approach to the study of intercultural communication is a result from our appropriating the quantitative, experimental methods of other disciplines. He cautioned that attempting to omit the foundation stage of theory building, extensive observation and description, and the commitment to analytical procedures has been "premature." Similar assessments have been made by Hymes (1964), Asante, Newmark & Blake (1979), and Saral (1979), among others.

One of the major criticisms of the analytic-quantitative-reductionist approach has been on its lack of sensitivity to the complex, transactional nature of human communication phenomena. In intercultural communication, in particular, this approach has been viewed by its critics as being unable to construct measurement scales that are valid and equivalent

across cultures. Bateson, one of the early proponents of the interactional approach, regarded as "heuristic error" the notion of a deterministic relationship between independent and dependent variables as conventionally defined in communication and other bheavioral sciences (Bateson, 1972). Bateson argued that such an approach distracts one from perceiving the ecology of the ideas which together constitute the small subsystems which he calls "context" (p. 338).

Recently, a number of alternative approaches following the "holistic-qualitative-contextual" orientation have been proposed to conceptualize and investigate human communication process. Although distinct from one another, all of these new approaches tend to view the predominant approach as less adequate in communication research. For example, the interactional approach (which stems from the systems approach) emphasizes communication systems with more than one person as its analytic unit (See Wilder, 1979, for a review). This approach focuses on the pattern of "connectedness" of individuals and the rules that operate within the communication system. Similarly, the structural-functionalism approach emphasizes the structure among variables, goals of the communication system, and the relationship between structures that produces functions facilitating the achievement of the goals (Fontes & Guardalabene, 1976).

Further, the constructivism approach has also been proposed as a viable alternative approach to studies of communication interaction centering on the subjective processes rather than the observable behavioral patterns of communicators (Delia, 1977). Based on a

phenomenological view, the constructivist rejects the analytic-quantitative-reductionist approach. Instead, it views the internalized personal constructs and reciprocal perspective-taking of communicators as fundamental processes underlying human communication. Instead of using "universal" measurements, the constructivism approach calls for methods yielding qualitative and descriptive data "preserving a structure imposed by the participants themselves" (p. 78).

These and other alternative approaches, however, are by and large still in the formative stages and have not offered a clear and consistent method of observing the intercultural communication phenomena in empirical research. Many of the concepts need to be further elaborated on before one can effectively employ the alternative paradigms. One of the main weaknesses of the holistic-qualitative-contextual approaches has been the substantial selectivity of perception and subjectivity of interpretation on the part of the researchers. Also, many of the findings in empirical studies in this tradition have been proved inconsistent due to the lack of systematic controls for eradicating the researchers' subjectivity. (Detailed discussions of methodological issues in cross-cultural research can be found in Triandis, 1972; Brislin, Lonner & Thorndike, 1973; Starr & Wilson, 1977; Burk & Lukens, 1979, among others.)

F. Summary and Conclusion

So far, I have attempted to clarify some of the definitional and conceptual confusions and examine the current status of empirical research in intercultural communication. First, I stressed the importance for intercultural communication scholars and researchers to focus on the central theme of our area, i.e., inter-cultural contact and communication. Second, three dimensions of the domain of intercultural communication--level of cultural system, social context, and communication channels--were presented as criteria for defining conceptual boundaries of specific inquiries. Third, two modes of empirical research in intercultural communication--group level and individual level--were explained with examples from studies in anthropology, sociology, and cross-cultural psychology, as well as in intercultural communication. Fourth, the focal issue in methodology in intercultural communication research was identified as the disagreement in views between the predominant analytical-quantitative-reductionist approach and the holistic-qualitative-contextual approach.

It seems too early for scholars and researchers in intercultural communication to come to an agreement as to which approach is superior. While the communication process that we investigate is multi-dimensional, transactional, and complex, any single methodological perspective opts to carry a set of assumptions or restrictions which limit its usefulness in fully describing, explaining, and predicting the reality. The restriction inevitably requires simplification of the reality to be inquired

about and studied. At the current stage of development of the scientific study of intercultural communication, we may temporarily suspend our judgements on the "supremacy" of any one particular perspective and, instead, devote more efforts to continue to elaborate and verify them through empirical research. In time, the conditions and content areas in which each perspective is most adequate and useful may be clarified.

There is no convincing reason to believe that the use of holistic assessment should serve as an impasse to the construction of analytic principles of human communication, and vice versa. As Delia (1977) pointed out,"there is no inherent conflict between idiographic assessment and nomothetic science. The conflict is between the nomothetic ideal of universal measurement and the fact of individuality" (p. 77). We need to encourage diverse approaches to develop fully and, at the same time, explore ways in which different methodological approaches may complement each other's limitations. Perhaps then, the field of communication may reach a more mature and integrated stage of development in which the seemingly conflicting perspectives will find their respective vantage points and contribute to the development of a unified theory of human communication.

The simultaneous and active interplay between diverse approaches and a creative integration of them is what I envision as an important direction for us to follow in the 80's. I hope that the conceptualization of intercultural communication and the identification of methodological issues presented in this paper will serve as a small step forward in this direction.

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